

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-DWASHINGTON TIMES
11 December 1985

Another chance for victory in Angola

SMITH HEMPSTONE

Back in 1981, when this observer witnessed the fall of the Angolan town of Mavinga to Jonas Savimbi's anti-Communist guerrillas, he reported that the United States had a golden opportunity to strike a heavy blow against Soviet adventurism in Africa by aiding the rebel forces.

True, the 1976 Clark Amendment forbade such assistance to Mr. Savimbi, who has been fighting the puppet MPLA government and its Cuban mercenaries since Angola achieved its bogus independence in

1975. But, as this reporter pointed out to Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker, there is more than one way to skin the Angolan cat: Morocco's pro-Western King Hassan was helping UNITA, and American aid could have been funneled through him.

Four years — and that opportunity — have been wasted. Mr. Savimbi's 60,000 men are still fighting, and without a dime of American help. Mavinga, despite a major Russian-led offensive, is still in the hands of UNITA (the National Union for the

Total Independence of Angola). So is Jamba, Mr Savimbi's headquarters, despite a heavy Communist attack.

And Mr. Crocker and the cunctative George Shultz are still dreaming up reasons why the United States, now that the Clark Amendment has been repealed, shouldn't help UNITA. Each of those reasons holds about as much water as a sieve.

Sending Mr. Savimbi so much as a blanket, they suggest (repeating their argument for helping the equally Marxist Mozambican gov-

ernment of Samora Machel against its anti-Communist guerrillas), will only make the MPLA more dependent than it is on the Soviets and their 35,000 Cuban surrogates.

Since Soviet officers are in operational control of all Angolan units down to the battalion level — and other Warsaw Pact nationals run the country's railroads, fisheries, and collective farms — it is difficult to see how Angola could be more dependent than it is on the Kremlin.

Angola's arsenal of Soviet military hardware — 500 tanks, more than 100 fixed-wing aircraft, and about 25 Mi-24 helicopter gunships — is conservatively valued at \$1.5 billion.

But aid to UNITA, protest Messrs. Crocker and Shultz, could upset the delicate multilateral negotiations aimed at securing the withdrawal of the Cuban troops from Angola in exchange for a pullout of South African forces from Namibia, and independence for that benighted country.

Sure. Mr. Crocker, by his own admission, has spent 80 percent of his time for the past five years on those negotiations, to the detriment of American interests elsewhere in Africa. And what is there to show for it despite a two-day meeting in Lusaka only last month? Zero.

But, the State Department's hand-wringers point out, those awful South Africans are helping Mr. Savimbi. If we send aid to UNITA, we'll be getting in bed with Pretoria.

Those awful South Africans are helping Mr. Savimbi for their own reasons, and he accepts their help for his reasons. American aid to UNITA could only lessen Mr. Savimbi's dependence on South Africa, which he would dearly love. (Besides, we're already in bed with those awful fellows: we have to have their minerals).

But, posit the cookie-pushers, aiding Mr. Savimbi would only widen the Angola conflict. You bet it would: if we sent UNITA a few hundred hand-held, ground-to-air missiles and an equal number of anti-tank weapons, Mr. Savimbi would take the war right up to the gates of Luanda, the Angolan capital. And would that be such a bad thing?

Mr. Savimbi's demands are as simple as they are reasonable. He's not asking to be handed control of Angola on a plate. All he's asking is

reconstitution of the tripartite MPLA-UNITA-FNLA coalition government in accordance with the Alvor Agreement under which Angola was granted independence, to be followed by free elections.

In short, he's asking America — and the world — to give democracy a chance in Angola: he'll abide by the verdict of the ballot box.

Such a solution is, of course, anathema to the Marxist MPLA government, because they know they would lose a free election and UNITA would win it (FNLA, while it still exists under its longtime leader, Holden Roberto, no longer is a major factor in the equation).

That is precisely why the Cuban troops, some of whom were brought into Angola before independence, are there: to protect the MPLA from the people of Angola. And that is why they will stay there until they are routed on the battlefield by Mr. Savimbi's forces.

Claude Pepper, the veteran Florida Democrat, has introduced legislation in the House to provide \$27 million in humanitarian aid to UNITA, along the same lines as the help earmarked for the Nicaraguan resistance (President Ronald Reagan apparently favors covert assistance).

That is absolutely the bare minimum the United States ought to be doing to help Mr. Savimbi, who has paid his dues over the past decade in the global fight against Communist tyranny.

Smith Hempstone is a nationally syndicated columnist.